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ABSTRACT

This study examined the language and cultural attitudes of 45 bilingual Spanish/English adolescents of Spanish, Peruvian, and Chilean background enrolled in Saturday Spanish programs in Sydney, Australia. Each student had at least one parent whose first language was Spanish. A 60-item questionnaire designed to elicit information on factors considered important for language learning and maintenance was administered. The survey found that although each national group indicated high interest in learning and maintaining the Spanish language, a consistently stronger tendency towards language maintenance was exhibited by Peruvian-background students and towards assimilation by the Chilean-background students, with the Spanish-background students on average taking an intermediary position. The study indicates the need for considering the different Spanish-speaking nationalities separately when considering their attitudes toward language maintenance and assimilation. (Contains 34 references.) (MDM)

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MAINTENANCE OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE AS REFLECTED BY ADOLESCENTS OF CHILEAN, PERUVIAN AND SPANISH BACKGROUND IN SYDNEY.

A paper delivered at the 10th SOCIOLINGUISTICS SYMPOSIUM in Lancaster, March 1994

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ABSTRACT

This investigation of language maintenance arose from an interest in the tensions that can exist in the same language community between desire for assimilation and desire to maintain one's language. The present study suggests that this tension exists in the Spanish speaking community of Sydney. Subjects were forty five bilingual Spanish/English adolescents of Spanish, Peruvian and Chilean background, enrolled in Spanish classes in the Department of Education's Saturday Schools who had at least one parent whose first language was Spanish. A questionaire designed to elicit information on factors considered important for language learning and maintenance was administered. It was found that, although each national group indicated high interest in learning and maintaining the Spanish language, a consistently stronger tendency towards language maintenance was exhibited by Peruvian subjects and towards assimilation by the Chileans, Spanish subjects on average taking an intermediary position. Suggestions are put forward regarding possible explanations of these results. The study indicates the need for considering the different Spanish speaking nationalities separately when considering the maintenance of Spanish rather than, as has been done in the past, combining the various South American nationalities as though they were a homogeneous group. The study is placed within the context of Australian language planning and policies.

MAINTENANCE OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE AS REFLECTED BY ADOLESCENTS OF CHILEAN, PERUVIAN AND SPANISH BACKGROUND IN SYDNEY.

INTRODUCTION

This study had two starting points:

1. An interest in the tensions that exist between multiculturalism on the one hand and assimilation on the other.
2. Recognition that the countries from which Spanish speakers have come to Australia have different cultures and histories, migration has occurred for different reasons, yet most studies of language maintenance (both in Australia and the United States) have not differentiated between the different countries of Latin America.

The delicate balance that can exist within an individual between the desire to integrate into the dominant community and fear of losing one's own culture and language was described by Clément (1980) and is an essential element in the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality associated with the name of Howard Giles. Similar pressures appear to pull different ethnic communities either towards language maintenance or assimilation, Clyne (1991) indicating that Turks in Australia showed the lowest language shift towards English, while the Dutch are on the other side of the pole, showing the highest degree of language shift of all ethnic communities studied. The same phenomenon is reflected in the history of Australia's language policy, Lo Bianco (1990) emphasising that the policy was achieved despite considerable opposition. Indeed, linguists themselves appear to be strung between the two poles of urging multilingualism and accepting the inevitability, in circumstances such as those within Australia, of language shift .

Edwards (1985) forms part of the latter group, as evidenced by the following comments:

> Most minority groups are, above all, pragmatic and this usually implies a considerable assimilationist sentiment. (p.141)

> There is, I believe, a general inevitability to language shift under certain conditions, and no amount of revivalism or educational support can significantly affect the powerful social currents which produce shift. (p.159)

Smolicz (1992), on the other hand, espouses multilingualism, writing:

> In an ethnically plural society, cultures of both the majority and minority groups constitute pools of cultural values from which members can draw to formulate their own personal cultural systems...In the case of language, individuals are in a position to construct dual systems of linguistic values and achieve in society a

> state of "internal cultural pluralism" , as opposed to a situation where society as a whole exhibits pluralism, while individuals retain monistic systems. (p.276)

The present study indicates that similar pulls may exert pressure on the one speech community, Spanish speakers of one nationality being more inclined towards language maintenance than those of others. The Spanish language is what Romaine (1991) called a pluricentric language, one used by several nations. Its speakers recognise different norms and identify differently to the language. It is reasonable to expect that variations in extent of language maintenance may exist between subgroups within a speech community based on these differences and on different migration vintages. According to the 1991 Census, Spanish was the seventh most spoken language other than English in Australia, with 86,286 speakers (calculated as 0.6% of the population over five years of age). Clyne's (1991) information on language maintenance among Spanish speakers in Australia indicates a relatively high level of language maintenance, people of South American background maintaining the language slightly more than those of Spanish background. No attempt, however, was made in this study to differentiate between South Americans on nationality, indeed the census, on which the study was based, does not distinguish between national groups. It was pointed out to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 1992 that

> One of the major misconceptions which Australians have about Latin America [is] that Latin America is a region made up of homogeneous countries (p.21)

This study compares Spanish speakers from three different national backgrounds on factors considered important for language maintenance.

Subjects were Year 10 and 11 (aged approximately 15-17) Spanish/English bilinguals of Spanish, Peruvian and Chilean parent(s) living in Sydney and studying Spanish. All subjects had lived in Australia for a minimum of two years and had at least one parent who is a native speaker of Spanish. These nationalities were chosen on the basis of numbers of questionnaires returned on time. Two other numerically important nationalities, Argentina and Uruguay, were not included in the study because at the time of commencing analysis of results insufficient questionnaires from subjects of these backgrounds had been returned.

SPANISH IN AUSTRALIA

Of the three nationalities studied, Spanish immigrants have been in Australia in numbers for the longest period of time (particularly since the early '60's), followed

by Chileans and later Peruvians. Of the three, only Chileans came in significant numbers as political refugees, practically all Spaniards and most Peruvians coming for economic reasons.

Conditions for Spanish language maintenance in Sydney are favourable, classes being available for all age groups and Spanish being an optional final school examination subject (offered at Saturday Schools where not provided by the school attended). Publications and television programs in Spanish are widely available through bookstores, newspapers, public libraries and ethnic television.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Linguists appear to agree, in general, on conditions that may bring about language shift and loss, and various attempts have been made to establish typologies which may permit predictions regarding language maintenance. For the purposes of this questionnaire, the thirty-three factors suggested by Edwards (1992), Giles and Goupland's (1991) approach of focusing on the circumstances under which people become bilingual and the climates which give a language long-term viability, and theories of ethnolinguistic vitality have proven helpful

The areas on which the questionnaire focused as being potent social and psychological forces propelling individuals towards the learning and maintenance of a minority language were:

1) Attitudes towards the language.
2) Attitudes towards the community of ethnic background.
3) Sense of ethnic identity.
4) Motivation (integrative and instrumental).
5) Parental support.

Proficiency was also rated through self-assessent on competencies and teacher assessments on the four skills.

The questionnaire was wide ranging, attempting to elicit information on the above mentioned factors as well as information about socio-economic status, sex, age, length of residence in Australia, languages spoken by parents and grandparents, feelings about being bilingual and general aspects of subjects' lives which were perceived as having helped/hindered them in maintaining the Spanish language.

Most questions were closed questions, although the possibility for comments and space for adding *other* elements were included where appropriate. There was one general open question asking subjects for their feelings about being bilingual. Otherwise, the non-biographical questions were all scaled questions.

Separate questionnaires were prepared for respondents of Spanish and South American background (with instructions that the respondent reply considering "South America" to refer to his/her own particular country of family background) in order to identify each participant's attitudes towards his/her own cultural heritage.

Districts chosen (Chatswood, Liverpool, Randwick and Kogarah) were considered to represent various socio-economic groups and both inner-city and outer-city areas.

RESULTS

Subjects responded to sixty questions which asked them to rate, on a scale of 5 (extremely) to 1 (not at all) factors considered important for language maintenance. These were combined in some cases and averages were obtained, the following indicating pertinent results:

AVERAGES FOR EACH NATIONAL GROUP ON FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE.

POSITIVE FACTORS	SPAIN	PERU	CHILE
1. Importance of speaking Sp.	4.33	4.80	3.73
2. Enjoyment of Sp. language	4.47	4.60	4.20
3. Sense of ethnic identy	3.33	4.13	3.40
4. Helped by family encouragmnt	4.40	4.53	4.20
5. Perception of community's valuing of Sp./Sp. speakers	2.24	2.53	2.24
6. Integrative motivation	4.17	4.19	3.69
7. Instrumental motivation	4.15	4.13	3.53
8.Willingness to work to maintain Spanish	2.93	3.28	2.82
9. Desire that offspring learn Sp	4.47	4.60	4.20
10.Desire Sp. speaking company	3.00	3.71	3.13
11.Lang. as core value of identity	3.93	3.67	3.13
12. Self-assessment of proficncy	4.20	4.36	4.06
13.Teacher assessment profcncy	3.90	4.06	3.82
TOTALS	49.52	52.59	46.15
AVERAGES	3.81	4.04	3.55
NEGATIVE FACTORS			
Difficulty of acceptance by commty	2.20	2.80	2.40
Hindered by home discouragt.	1.40	1.07	1.00
Negative attitudes in commty.	1.40	1.87	1.67
TOTALS	5.00	5.74	5.07
AVERAGES	1.66	1.91	1.69
OTHER			
Appreciatn of ethnic culture	3.93	3.05	3.32

TABLE 1 (a score of 5 = *extremely*, 1 = *not at all*)

SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There appears to be a high level of language maintenance among all three groups studied. A slight but consistent pattern of differences can be observed on most of the factors considered to have a positive influence on language maintenance, Peruvian subjects scoring most highly, Chileans having the lowest scores and subjects of Spanish background being found to take an intermediary position. The following chart indicates average responses for points 1-13 from the above table.

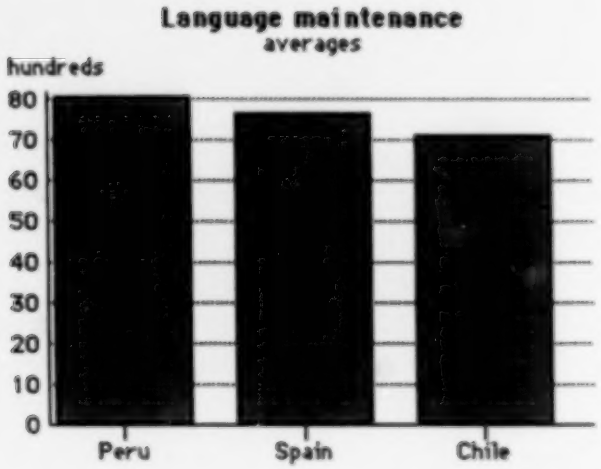

CHART 1

This tendency was surprisingly consistent throughout, with the exception of scores on attitudes towards the ethnic culture. According to theories of ethnolinguistic vitality, a group that values its own culture highly is more likely to maintain its language. Peruvian subjects in this study gave high ratings on all factors but this, a discrepancy which has been noted in other studies (e.g. Kraemer and Olshtain 1989) and which can be explained by Tajfel's theory of social identity: this theory explains that perception of low status and weak political power foster the need to seek social identity based on positively valued distinctiveness from the dominant group. Language is often seen as an appropriate distinctive value. I suggest that this may be the basis of the results of the Peruvian subjects whose less positive attitudes towards their own culture coincided with more positive valuing of the language and stronger motivation for maintaining it.

Such an interpretation was put forward by Kraemer and Olshtain (1989) to explain results of their study. They found that Arab students who saw their group prestige and political power as lower (than Jewish subjects) had a higher evaluation of their language. Other studies with similar results have been done on bilingual Welsh speakers (Giles and Johnson 1987, Johnson, Giles and Bourhis 1983 in Kramer and Olshtain 1989) - of those who identified more strongly with their group, stronger pro-Welsh attitudes were held by those who perceived their group vitality as lower.

Peruvians also had the highest perceptions of the difficulty of being accepted by the Australian community and of having experienced negative attitudes in the school or

community towards the speaking of Spanish. Ethnolinguistic vitality theory suggests that perception of hard barriers promote language maintenance.

The stronger tendency of Peruvian subjects towards language maintenance is likely to be a product of the fact that they had resided in Australia for the shortest average period of the three groups (7.5 years). It could also be associated with the fact that most Peruvians have migrated to Australia for economic rather than political reasons, and the possibility of returning has always been a reality.

Chileans, on the other hand, have emigrated in greater numbers for political reasons, and for many the myth of return has remained a myth until very recently. This may go some way to explaining the fact that, in this study, Chilean subjects showed the greatest tendency towards language shift - families may have started life in Australia with greater determination to assimilate than Spanish and Peruvian families whose motives for migrating were, to a greater degree, economic. Clyne (1989) indicated that in Australia (for reasons of greater exogamy) male gender promotes language shift. There were slightly more male subjects in the Chilean group (8) than in the Spanish(10) and Peruvian (9) groups.

Although Spanish subjects had resided, on average, for the longest period of time of the three groups (12.27 years), and appear to have acquired a greater sense of Australian identity, their level of language maintenance appears to place them above the Chileans and below the Peruvians. This group had the highest number of grandparents who spoke only Spanish, so it can be assumed that the language is a longer established part of their heritage. The grandparents of seven Peruvian and eight Chilean subjects had spoken a variety of languages other than Spanish, including native dialects, compared with the grandparents of only three Spanish background subjects.

Supporting the results, both self-assessment and teacher-assessment of proficiency reflected the same tendency of Peruvians to the highest and Chileans to the lowest language maintenance of the three groups. Average self-assessments were, in each case, slightly higher than teacher-assessments, a possible indication of healthy self-confidence.

Average results for biographical data were as follows:

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA	SPAIN	PERU	CHILE
Male	5	6	8
Female	10	9	7
Both parents Spanish speakers	14	14	13
Both grandparents Sp. only speakers	12	7	7
Years in Australia	12.27	7.5	10.67
People to whom Sp. spoken	5	6.27	6.07
Places in which Sp. spoken	2.67	3.13	3.47

TABLE 2

SUMMARY

Perhaps the most indicative single question for predicting possible future trends in language maintenance and one which encapsulates the findings of this study was the question which asked subjects to express the extent to which they agreed with the statement *I would like my children to learn Spanish.* Averages for all three nationalities were between 4 and 5 (that is, between agreeing and agreeing totally). The Peruvian background subjects were most in agreement with the statement with 4.60, the Chileans least in agreement with 4.20 and the Spanish in an intermediary position with 4.47. Although all three national groups appear to be in no doubt that they would like their children to learn Spanish, results suggest that future language maintenance is more likely for the Peruvian and, to a slightly lesser extent, Spanish group than for the Chilean group.

CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that there is, indeed, a strong desire for language maintenance among the Spanish speaking community of Sydney. It also suggests that the bi-polar tension between assimilation and multilingualism which can exist within individuals and between language groups may also exist within the Spanish speaking community of Sydney. Spanish speakers of Peruvian and Spanish background seem pulled towards multilingualism, while Chileans appear more disposed to assimilate, with the consequent possibility of faster shift from bilingualism to the use of English only. A larger scale study would, however, be required in order to validate these indications.

Results suggest that Clyne's (1991) conclusion on the basis of very valuable and detailed Census comparisons that Spanish speakers of South America have higher language maintenance than Spanish speakers from Spain may benefit from further investigation, since Spanish subjects in this study revealed consistently higher scores than Chileans on important factors affecting language maintenance. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the complex issue of language maintenance among the Spanish speaking community, the study points toward the need to investigate the different national groups separately.

Although maintenance of the Spanish language in Sydney appears guaranteed for the present generation, this study suggests that Peruvians may be more likely to maintain the language in the future, Chileans more likely to shift from bilingualism towards English only more quickly, and Spanish families to take an intermediary position. This is a fairly small scale study, however it does make clear that we need to differentiate among Latin American Spanish speakers by country, rather than grouping them together as a homogeneous set as has been done in the past.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE POLICY

The Green Paper (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990:21), which encapsulates Australia's language policy, justifies the learning of languages for three reasons

1. Intellectual, educational and cultural enrichment;
2. Pragmagic reasons relating to the contribution made by language knowledge to economic, diplomatic, strategic, scientific and technological development; and
3. Social reasons, relating to needs for communication within families and throughout the broader Australian community.

Lo Bianco (1990) considered that there are two important attitudes towards language teaching in Australia and identified tension, which he predicted may worsen, between two groups: the 'Anglo-Asianists' and the 'Community Language - Multiculturalism Advocates.' The Anglo-Asianists, he considered, have the dominant position, and their attitudes towards language teaching reflect their interest in the relationship between economics (specifically, Australia's economic interests in Asia) and language, playing down social and cultural issues. They have promoted the learning of Mandarin Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian. The Community Language - Multiculturalism group is led by north and east Europeans but is composed largely of southern Europeans and contains many Asian communities, speakers of languages like Vietnamese, Laotian, Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka Chinese, Laotian and Kampuchean - languages not considered so economically important, but no less deserving of

support for the first and third reasons put forward by the Green Paper. The two groups are vying for the distribution of resources.

Clyne (1991:35) echoed this tension;

> It is ironic that while the impetus for the National Policy on Languages and the support for language learning in general came from Australia's multiculturalism, the direction of emphasis on 'trade languages' could undermine the position of many languages used in Australia.

I would like to suggest that the Spanish language can make its claim for support for language maintenance through the arguments put forward by both these groups. Trade, investment and cultural contacts between Australia and Latin America are strong and promise to become stronger.

The most persuasive reason, however, for support for the teaching of the Spanish language, is the large number of Spanish speakers and their interest in maintaining their native language which I believe is evidenced by this study.

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